



BIG MONEY OUT VA

“DEMOCRACY LOSES WHEN BIG MONEY WINS”

ISSUE BRIEF: Strengthening campaign finance disclosure laws
88% of Virginians support the public disclosure of contributions.
86% of Virginians support requiring reporting for online donations.

OVERVIEW

Increased transparency through disclosure, the so-called “sunshine factor,” helps discourage some contributions from donors who want to remain secret or private, in particular dark money coming from out-of-state. Yet, in Virginia, there is nothing preventing candidates or obscure donors from being vague when filing reports on campaign contributions and expenditures. Investments need to be made in the Department of Elections which monitors campaign financing records. Investments in information technology would allow public access to disaggregated campaign finance data through an easily accessible online system which is searchable and sortable. Poor access to this data makes it difficult to verify the accuracy and completeness of reports, and complicates compliance with existing regulations.

Isn't disclosure already a burden on candidates?

State of the art electronic filing systems offer user friendly filing and provide automatic verification mechanisms. This process guides and “helps” candidates to submit accurate and complete reports and provides reassurance to candidate campaigns that they are in compliance with reporting requirements.

States around the country have implemented strong campaign finance disclosure laws:

- Rhode Island requires political candidates and advocacy groups to disclose all donor names, job titles, employer information, and donation amounts, which are then posted on a government website for the public to easily and freely access. Strict disclosure of top funders of obscure groups protects legislators from anonymous ads.
- The Public Disclosure Commission of Washington State provides public access to information about campaign finance, lobbying expenditures, and the financial affairs of public officials.
- An independent, non-partisan body, the Connecticut State Elections Enforcement Commission provides candidates with filing and compliance assistance and monitors independent expenditure.

Stronger campaign finance disclosure laws in Virginia would aid in creating a Government that's more accountable and responsive to the people and more stringent disclosure requirements of dark money groups protects legislators.

Thanks to VPAP, isn't disclosure in Virginia already adequate?

As an independently funded non-profit, VPAP has no responsibility to the public to make available the taxpayer financed data on which they rely for their analytical analysis. Furthermore, since VPAP data is not available online to the public in a disaggregated, searchable, and sortable form, the public cannot easily use it to undertake their own detailed review and analysis.